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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PDP OFFICIAL MURDERED

REF: 2003 ABUJA 448

Classified By: Consul-General Robyn Hinson-Jones for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (U) On February 6, unknown assailants killed Chief Amino-Sari Dikibo, National Vice Chairman of the South-South Zone of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), as he was traveling to attend a Conference of South-South Governors in Asaba, Delta State. Dikibo, who had a police escort and driver, was reportedly shot once in the head after two cars stopped in front of his convoy and turned around to pursue him along the Kwale-Ogwashi-Uku road in northeastern Delta State. Observers who viewed the body and vehicle said Dikibo's skull was "shattered."

12. (U) In his monthly television address, President Olusegun Obasanjo, a PDP member, said Dikibo was killed by "a band of armed robbers," eleven of whom are now in police custody. A press report indicates that Delta State highways experienced a spate of armed robberies last year and that on the day of Dikibo's death, armed gangs robbed several persons in the area. The same report noted that the driver of Dikibo's vehicle and escorting police officers were neither harmed in the alleged robbery nor were they stained with blood, although brain matter and blood stained the back seat of the vehicle.

13. (U) Press commentators have noted the similarity between Dikibo's murder and the political killing in March 2003 of Marshall Harry, the National Vice Chairman for the South-South Zone for the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), the most popular opposition party to the PDP in the region (reftel). Before his death, Harry, a former PDP politician, had repeatedly stated that he feared for his life. He blamed his fears on Peter Odili, Governor of Rivers State, who, Harry said, wanted him killed.

14. (U) To obtain further details on the murder, POLOFF spoke with Delta State Attorney General (AG), A. A. Utuama February 9. Utuama confirmed that the National Police Force in Asaba is investigating the incident. Utuama stated he had no further information beyond that reported by the press and an initial phone call from Delta State Governor James Ibori. (Standard procedure calls for a written report to be submitted to the AG after an investigation is complete, at which time the AG may recommend prosecution.) Commissioner of Police for Delta State Charles Akaya told POLOFF February 9 that he, too, could not discuss the case until he received clearance from headquarters in Abuja.

15. (C) COMMENT: The reported circumstances of Dikibo's death are not consistent with an armed robbery. None of his possessions were taken and the description of the single gunshot wound to his head implies he was shot at close range. Armed robberies in Nigeria usually involve automatic and semi-automatic weapons fired indiscriminately at victims. If Dikibo's death is the result of a robbery, it is highly unusual that a driver seated in the car with the victim survived unscathed. The reported facts of the shooting suggest an assassination.

16. (C) Motives for the possible assassination are unknown. However, it is unusual that high-ranking members of his own party, including the President, have so quickly dismissed his murder as a bungled robbery. The relatively close timing of the murder to the anniversary of the assassination of Marshall Harry makes it difficult to simply dismiss Dikibo's death on the grounds that he simply was a man in the wrong place at the wrong time. Circumstances point to various possibilities: a reprisal assassination by the ANPP avenging Harry, a PDP insider acting alone, or a calculated move within PDP. Dikibo may have been on the wrong side of continuing feuds between the President and Vice President or a feud between the President and the southern governors, one of whom, James Ibori of Delta State, has been known to be involved in the killing of rivals. END COMMENT.  
HINSON-JONES